

San Antonio, TX-Congressman Ciro D. Rodriguez (TX-23) announced today announced \$343,000 in funding he has secured for a program aimed at reducing the number of teen car crash fatalities in San Antonio. The money will be used to expand the successful Teens in the Driver Seat (TDS) program, America's first peer-to-peer safety program for young drivers. More than 6,000 teens die every year in traffic crashes - the number one cause of death, by far, for this age group.

"6,000 young lives lost each year in our country to teen car crashes is the equivalent to nearly two and a half times the enrollment here at Taft Communications Arts High School," Rodriguez noted in his announcement. "But that's not how these tragedies happen; they happen one or two at a time, which is why this problem isn't getting the attention we believe it deserves. With this funding, the Teens in the Driver Seat program will work to change that."

TDS is designed to address both risk awareness and driving behavior, relying largely on the power of peer-based communication. Surveys of high school students across Texas show that young drivers and their passengers are largely unaware of the risks they face. Those risks include driving at night, distractions such as cell phones and too many teen passengers, speeding, low seat belt use, and alcohol. The surveys also indicate that teens frequently engage in risky driving behaviors.

"Numerous studies - and our own experience - tell us that teenagers listen to each other far more than they listen to adults. What better way then, to make them safer on the roadways, than to have them carry the message to each other?" said Hope Andrade, Chairwoman of the Texas Transportation Commission, who joined Rodriguez for the announcement. "For the past few years, that's what we've been doing at TxDOT through our involvement in the TDS program."

TDS was originally launched on the campus of Communications Arts and adjacent Taft High School in a 2003 pilot study. In that effort, the peer-to-peer communication effort helped raise awareness of certain driving risks by as much as 200 percent. Since that time, the TDS program has spread to nearly 100 schools across Texas.

"We're working to stop the number-one killer of teenagers in America," Rodriguez said. "And I am proud to be able to augment these efforts for Southwest Texas by making the federal funding available."

Below is some more information on TDS program:

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- TDS is working to stop the number-one killer of teenagers in America
- 6,000 teen deaths annually in U.S.; 500 in Texas
- 16-year-olds 10 times more likely to die in a car crash than other age groups
- Teens involved in 50 percent more crashes in Texas than U.S. average
- \$41 billion problem in U.S.; \$3.5 billion problem in Texas
- Numerous factors complicate the problem
- Nearly half learn through parent-taught driver education
- Nearly 90 percent don't take the on-road driving test
- No significant impact of graduated driver licensing in Texas
- Focus on alcohol misses the mark; other risks are more prevalent
- Absence of teen messengers compromises credibility and effectiveness
- TDS uses peer-to-peer education and outreach as its foundation
- Began five years ago in San Antonio; tested and refined in recent years
- Focuses on lesser-known risks common in young driver fatalities
- Teens shape & deploy the program; TTI provides the science and resources
- First program of its kind in the nation
- TDS is working, and growing
- In a dozen regions of Texas, and in more than 80 schools
- Assessments show awareness levels improving by up to 200%; seat belt use up 11 % and cell phone/texting down 30% at TDS Program schools
- T-driver.com web traffic up 1,500% in past year; 30,000+ hits per month; length of website visits up 100% in past year
- School administrators and students are eager to try the program; a great program for teens seeking community service/service learning projects
- Addresses a real problem; presents substantial positive PR opportunities
- Has earned several national and international awards
- Positions Texas to be a national leader on a high-profile issue

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Congressman **Ciro D. Rodriguez** is a former social worker who currently serves on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs and the powerful House Committee on Appropriations.□ For more information on Congressman Rodriguez please visit <http://rodriguez.house.gov/> .